

# WHERE



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*by*

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قَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَتَكُون لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ يَعْقِلُونَ بِهَا أَوْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا  
فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِنْ تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ

°afalam yasīrū fi-l-°arḍi  
fa-takūna lahum qulūbun ya°qilūna bihā  
°aw °āadhānuñy-yasma°ūna bihā:  
fa-°innahā lā ta°ma-l-°abāṣāru  
wa lakin ta°ma-l-qulūbu °allatī fi-ṣ-ṣudūr

Have they not travelled about the earth  
and do they not have hearts to understand with or ears to hear with?  
It is not their eyes which are blind  
but the hearts in their breasts which are blind.  
(Sūrah al-Ḥajj 22:46)

إِنِّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَذِكْرٍ لِمَنْ كَانَ لَهُ قَلْبٌ أَوْ أَلْقَى السَّمْعَ وَهُوَ شَهِيدٌ

°inna fī ḍhalika ladhikrā li-man kāna lahu qalbun  
°aw °alqa-s—sam°a wa huwa ṣhahīdun

There is a reminder in that for anyone who has a heart,  
or who listens well, having seen the evidence.  
(Sūrah Qaf 50:37)



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## Preface:

In my last talk for the Sunday series “Tasawwuf Now: What, Why, Who, Where and When” held under the auspices of the Islamic Study Center in Charlottesville, Virginia I was speaking on the subject of “Who” when the call (أَذَانُ/ʿaḍḥān) for the Noon Prayer came and I was unable to finish the talk due to the exigencies of time.

So I closed that talk on “Who?” saying that there was more I had to say on the subject but it would have to wait for another time.

The concluding, and very important, section of that essay on the subject of “Who?” was based on the “*Doctrine of Photisms*” according to Najm Rāzī (1256) as recorded in the book, “*The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*” by Henri Corbin in the original 1978 Shambhala Publications edition (Translation © 1971 by Henri Viaud) and I have now chosen to use that same concluding section as the preface to this essay on “Where” as this essay needs a more internal (باطني) opening given that what I have written is a fairly straight forward traditional exposition based on the teachings of *The Purification of the Heart* compiled from the works of Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, Ibn Al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali as derived from the ʾIḥyāʾ ʿUlūmu-d-dīn (إحياء علوم الدين).

I thought it would be best to use the excerpt in its original form as an introduction to what follows on the subject matter of the Heart as the locus of *Where* so as to give the reader an idea of the place within where a person might arrive who had successfully carried out the ‘work’ of purification resulting in a heart that is whole (*qalban salīm*/قَلْبٌ سَلِيمٌ) and capable of containing both this vision and, importantly, being that worthy container mentioned in the ḥadīth:

لا يحتوي على البيانات ولكن قلب المؤمن

Nothing contains me but the heart of the believer.

(Ḥadīth Qudṣī)

This subject, among others, of *The Purification of the Heart* was taught by my Ṣhāykh, Dr. Ibrahim Muḥammad al-Batawī رحمه الله at al-Azhar for some twenty five years and, as such, was my own introduction to the subject and a subject he conveyed to his many students scattered across this world (and the next).



## 2. The Doctrine of Photisms according to Najm Rāzī (1256)

Najm Rāzī,<sup>109</sup> direct disciple of Najm Kobrā, is the author of a mystical treatise in Persian still in current use today in Iranian Sufism, wherein the chapters particularly related to our subject deal with visionary apperceptions (*moshāhadāt*) and the unveilings of the suprasensory (*mokāshafāt*).<sup>110</sup> Their *leitmotiv* makes the distinction between the theophanies or apparitions of divine lights which are those of the "Lights of Majesty" and the theophanies which are those of the "Lights of Beauty." Majesty (i.e. rigor, inaccessible sublimity) and Beauty (fascination, attraction, graciousness): these are the two great categories of attributes which refer respectively to the divine Being as *Deus absconditus* and as *Deus revelatus*, Beauty being the supreme theophany, divine self-revelation.<sup>111</sup> In fact they are inseparable and there is a constant interplay between the inaccessible Majesty of Beauty and the fascinating Beauty of inaccessible Majesty. The interplay is even such that Najm Kobrā, when, principles, perceives a transference corresponding to a mutual exchange of the masculine and feminine attributes (§4). And to suggest that their twofoldness is necessary for the spiritual individuality to be born, he quotes this saying of the Sufi Abū-Bakr Wāsitī: "The attribute of Majesty and the attribute of Beauty intermingle; from their union the Spirit is born. The son is an allusion to partial reality; the father and mother an allusion to total reality." (§65). According to Najm Rāzī, photisms, pure lights and colored lights, refer to the attributes of Beauty; the "black light" refers to the attributes of Majesty. He outlines the "physiology of the man of light" concurrently with the theory of the "unveilings of the suprasensory world."

First of all, as a general rule, the capacity to perceive suprasensory lights is proportionate to the degree of polishing, chiefly the work of the *dhikr*, which brings the heart to the state of perfect mirror. In the beginning these lights are manifested as ephemeral flashes. The more perfect the transparency (the "specularity") of the mirror, the more they grow, the longer they last, the more diverse they become, until they manifest the

form of heavenly entities. As a general rule also, the source where these Lights take shape is the spiritual entity of the mystic, his *rūhānīyat*, the very same, as we have seen (*supra* II, 1), in Sohrawardī and the Hermetists under the name of Perfect Nature, the philosopher's "Angel." But besides this we have to take into consideration that every spiritual state, every function, every feeling, every act, has its spiritual entity, its "Angel" which manifests itself in the light proper to it. Prophecy (*nobowwat*), Initiation (*walāyat*), the spirits of the Initiates (*Awliyā*), the great shaykhs of Sufism, the Qorān, the profession of Islam, the fidelity of faith (*īmān*),<sup>112</sup> even every form of *dhikr*, every form of divine office and worship, each one of these realities is expressed in a light proper to it.

In the description given by our author of the suprasensory phenomena of pure light, what we note in short is the following: brief flashes and flames most often originate from the liturgical acts (prayer, ritual ablution, etc.). A longer and brighter light is that from the Qorān or from the *dhikr*. There may be visualization of the well-known verse from the chapter Light (24:35): "The image of His light is that of a Niche wherein there is a lamp, the lamp is in a case of glass . . ." Here the "Niche of lights" manifests a light of the prophecy or else of the initiatic quality of the shaykh. Tapers, lamps and live embers manifest the different forms of *dhikr* or else are an effect of the light of gnosis. All the forms of stars which are shown in the Skies of the heart (*āsmān-e del*) are, as in Najm Kobrā, lights manifesting the Angel; i.e., the esoteric aspect of the astronomical Sky that is its homologue (*bātin-e falak*). According to the heart's degree of purity, the star may be seen without its Sky or else with its Sky; in the latter case, the Sky is the "subtle astral mass" of the heart, whereas the star is the light of the Spirit. The Constellated figures manifest the *Animae coelestes*. Sun and moon may appear in various positions, each of which has its meaning. The full moon in the Sky of the heart manifests the effects of the initiation corresponding to the degree of lunar initiation (*walāyat-e qamarīya*); the sun manifests the effects of the solar or total initiation (*w. kollīya*). Several suns together are a manifestation of the perfect Initiates (*Awliyā-e kollī*). Sun and moon contemplated together are the joint manifestation of the form of the shaykh and the form of the absolute initiator.<sup>113</sup>



Sun, moon and stars may appear as though immersed either in the sea or in running water or on the contrary in motionless water, sometimes in a well. All the mystics recognize there the lights of their "spiritual entity." These immersions in a transparent element proclaim the extreme purity of the heart, the state of the "pacified soul," which, at the boundary, will allow the rays of the divine Lights to pierce through all the veils. This is the meaning of the verse in the *sūra* of the Star: "The heart does not belie what it has seen (53:11)," the mystical sense which sanctions the Prophet's visions ("My heart has seen my Lord in the most beautiful of forms") and the theophanies vouchsafed to Abraham and Moses.

Najm Rāzī knows it: it may be asked whether all these theophanies take place in the inner, esoteric world or rather in the outer, exoteric world? His answer is that anyone who asks this kind of question remains far from the real situation where the two worlds meet and coincide. In one case it may be that the suprasensory perception is awakened and stimulated by a sensory perception; between the sensory (*ḥissī*) and the suprasensory (*ghaybī*), the exoteric (*zāhir*) and the esoteric (*bātin*), there is synchronism and symbolism; these are even the foundation and criterion of visionary apperception. In another instance, a direct perception of the suprasensory by the organ of the heart may come about without a sensory organ or physical support (see *supra* IV, 1, *aura* and auric perception). In either case this organ of the heart (with the spiritual energy of the *Imagatrix*, effects a transmutation of the sensory so that it is perceived "in Hūrqulyā," on the plane of the *mundus imaginalis*, the *imaginal* world wherein "what is corporeal becomes spirit and what is spiritual assumes a body" ("our method is that of alchemy," said Najm Kobrā).<sup>114</sup> This is the meaning derived by spiritual hermeneutics from the verse on the Light: "God is the light of the Heavens and of the Earth" (24:35), for, in reality and in the true sense, what makes *manifest* (that is, light) and that which is *manifested* (*mazhar*, the theophanic form), what sees and what is seen are the divine Being himself. "When the meaning of Abraham's exclamation: *This is my Lord* has been mystically understood, then sensory and suprasensory, exoteric and esoteric, apparent and hidden, will be one and the same thing."

Where

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ فِي قُلُوبِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

huwa-lladhī ʾaanzala-s-sakīnata fī qulūbi-l-muʾminīn

He it is Who has sent down tranquillity on the hearts of the believers.

(Sūrātu-l-Faṭḥ 48:5)

لا يحتوي على البيانات ولكن قلب المؤمن

Nothing contains me but the heart of the believer.

(Ḥadīth Qudsī)

“هناك قطعة من اللحم في جسم الإنسان.  
إذا كانت هذه هي جيدة، وسوف جميع الأجهزة أن تكون جيدة.  
إذا كان هذا هو فاسد، وجميع الأجهزة تكون مدلل.  
هذا قطعة من اللحم هو القلب.”

“There is a piece of meat in the human body.

If this is good, all the organs will be good.

If this is spoiled, all the organs will be spoiled.

This piece of meat is the heart.”

Narrated by an-Numan bin Bashīr

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukḥarī

(Chapter N<sup>o</sup>: 2, Belief Ḥadīth N<sup>o</sup>: 49)



The whole question of “where?” in the end comes down to here, and if you ask where here is I will answer it is where the heart is.

The greater part of the Qurʾānic message is addressed to the human heart – a message which is audible to the ears of the heart alone, and is inscrutable to other receptive faculties. Accordingly great importance is attached to the care, protection, and development of this organ and by organ I am not refering here to the organ situated in the left side of the human body which pumps blood into the blood vessels but rather the sublime and distinguishing faculty of the human soul. Indeed Allāh ﷻ says:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا

qadā ʾaflaḥa man zakkāha

Successful is the one who purifies it.

(Sūratu-sh-Shams 91:9)

## Where

It is quite widely accepted, to the point where it has entered the realms of mass media, that purification or reparation of the heart is the very basis for the spiritual dimension of ʾIslām known as Sufism, and indeed, as noted in the Wikipedia, “Sufism is ‘a science whose objective is the reparation of the heart and turning it away from all else but Allāh’”<sup>1</sup>. Shaykh Nuh Ha Mim Keller notes, “*ʿIlm al-tasawwuf*, ‘the science of Sufism’ came into being to preserve and transmit a particular aspect of the ṣhārīʿah, that of ʾiḥlās or sincerity. It was recognized that the sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ was not only words and actions, but also states of being: that a Muslim must not only say certain things and do certain things, but must also be something. The ṣhārīʿah commands one, for example, in many Qurʾānic verses and ʾaḥādīth, to fear Allāh, to have sincerity toward Him, to be so certain in ones knowledge of Allāh that one worships Him as if one sees Him, to love the Prophet ﷺ more than any other human being, to show love and respect to all fellow Muslims, to show mercy, and to have many other states of the heart.”

So we can say that this principle of purification of the heart is widely known in present times as it has been throughout time in the traditional dimensions of the ʾIslamic world, by which I refer to that *Empire of Consciousness* that is embraced by some one billion plus people world wide.

However knowing that a principle is ‘operative’ and knowing what it actually is and how it works are two different things, and so I hope here to reiterate some of the principles of purification of the heart and then to go beyond what is after all just the beginnings to try and give the reader and listener an idea or understanding of what it might be like to live with a purified heart.

At the very beginning there is the understanding that when we read the Ḥadīth Qudsī where Allāh ﷻ says on the tongue of the Prophet ﷺ, “Nothing contains Me but the heart of the believer,” that if a person has a heart that is filled with filth, corruption and garbage there is obviously no room or space for Allāh ﷻ in such a place since Allāh ﷻ is all that is Pure and Ultimately Good.

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1. (Ahmed Zarruq, Zaineb Istrabadi, Hamza Yusuf Hanson—*The Principles of Sufism*) See also H.Y. Hanson’s widely popular, *Purification of the Heart: Signs, Symptoms and Cures of the Spiritual Diseases of the Heart*



Where

So the very first step is in taking the garbage out – rooting out corruption and cleaning the filth.

In the *The Purification of the Heart* compiled from the works of Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, Ibn Al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali we first of all find the description of hearts.

Just as the heart may be described in terms of being alive or dead, it may also be regarded as belonging to one of three types; these are the healthy heart, the dead heart, and the sick heart.



### The Healthy Heart

On the Day of Resurrection, only those who come to Allāh ﷻ with a healthy heart will be saved. Allāh ﷻ says:

يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ . إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

yawma lā yanfa°u mālun wa lā banūn  
°illa man °āta-llāha bi-qalbin salīm

A day on which neither wealth nor sons will be of any use,  
except for whoever brings to Allāh a sound heart.

(Sūrah Shu°ara° 26:88-89)

In defining the healthy heart, the following has been said: “It is a heart cleansed from any passion that challenges what Allāh ﷻ commands, or disputes what He forbids. It is free from any impulses which contradict His good. As a result, it is safeguarded against the worship of anything other than Him, and seeks the judgement of no other except that of His Messenger ﷺ. Its services are exclusively reserved for Allāh ﷻ, willingly and lovingly, with total reliance, relating all matters to Him, in fear, hope and sincere dedication.

When it loves, its love is in the way of Allāh ﷻ. If it detests, it detests in the light of what Allāh ﷻ detests. When it gives, it gives for Allāh ﷻ. If it withholds, it withholds for Allāh ﷻ. Nevertheless, all this will not suffice for its salvation until it is free from following, or taking as its guide, anyone other than His Messenger ﷺ.”

A servant (°abdullāh) with a healthy heart must dedicate it to its journey’s end and not base his actions and speech on those of any other person except the Prophet ﷺ of Allāh ﷻ.

Where

He must not give precedence to any other faith or words or deeds over those of Allāh ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ. Allāh ﷻ says:

بِأَنَّهُمُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِأَنَّهُمْ يُؤَيِّنُونَ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ  
وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

yāa ʾayyuha-lladhīna ʾamanū  
lā tuqaddimū bayna yadayi-llāhi wa rasūlihi wa ʾittaqu-llāha  
ʾinna-llāha samīʿun ʿalīm

Oh you who believe,  
do not put yourselves above Allāh and His Messenger,  
but be aware of Allah, for Allāh is Hearing, Knowing.  
(Sūratu-l-Hujjarāt 49:1)



### The Dead Heart

This is the opposite of the healthy heart. It does not know its Lord and does not worship Him as He commands, in the way which He likes, and with which He is pleased. It clings instead to its lusts and desires, even if these are likely to incur the displeasure and wrath of Allāh ﷻ. It worships things other than Allāh ﷻ, and its loves and its hatreds, and its giving and its withholding, arise from its whims, which are of paramount importance to it and preferred above the pleasure of Allāh ﷻ. Its whims are its leader (ʾimām). Its lust is its guide. Its ignorance is its leader. Its crude impulses are its motivation. It is immersed in its concern with worldly objectives. It is drunk with its own fancies and its love for hasty, fleeting pleasures.

It is called to Allāh ﷻ and the final world (*al-ʾākhirā*) from a distance but it does not respond to advice, and instead it follows any scheming, cunning shayṭān. Life angers and pleases it, and passion makes it deaf and blind<sup>2</sup> to anything except what is evil.

To associate and keep company with the owner of such a heart is to tempt illness: living with such a person is like taking poison, and befriending such a person brings about utter destruction.

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2. It has been related on the authority of Abu Darda<sup>°</sup> that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Your love for something that makes you blind and deaf.” Abu Daw<sup>°</sup>ūd, al-Adab, 14/38; Aḥmad, al-Musnad, 5/194. The hadith is classified as *ḥasan*.

Where



### The Sick Heart

This is a heart with life in it, as well as illness. The former sustains it at one moment, the latter at another, and it follows whichever one of the two manages to dominate it. It has love for Allāh ﷻ, faith in Him, sincerity towards Him, and reliance upon Him, and these are what give it life. It also has a craving for lust and pleasure, and prefers them and strives to experience them. It is full of self-admiration, which can lead to its own destruction. It listens to two callers: one calling it to Allāh ﷻ and His Prophet ﷺ and the final world (*al-ʿākhirah* / الأخرى); and the other calling it to the fleeting pleasures of this world. It responds to whichever one of the two happens to have most influence over it at the time.

The first heart is alive, submitted to Allāh ﷻ, humble, sensitive and aware; the second is brittle and dead; the third wavers between its safety or ruin.



### Symptoms Of the Heart's Sickness & Signs of Its Health

As we noted above, Allāh ﷻ says,

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ فِي قُلُوبِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

huwa-lladhī ʾaanzala-s-sakīnata fī qulūbi-l-muʾminīn

He it is Who has sent down tranquillity on the hearts of the believers.

(Sūrātu-l-Faṭḥ 48:5)

### Four-Symptoms Of the Heart's Sickness & Signs of Its Health

#### The Signs of a Sick Heart

A servant's heart may be ill, and seriously deteriorating, while they remains oblivious of its condition. It may even die without them realising it. The symptoms of its sickness, or the signs of its death, are that its owner is not aware of the harm that results from the damage caused by wrong actions, and is unperturbed by their ignorance of the truth or by their false beliefs.

Since the living heart experiences pain as a result of any ugliness that it encounters and through its recognising its ignorance of the truth (to a degree that corresponds to its level of awareness), it is capable of recognising the onset of decay-and the increase in the

## Where

severity of the remedy that will be needed to stop it – but then sometimes it prefers to put up with the pain rather than undergo the arduous trial of the cure!

Some of the many signs of the heart's sickness are its turning away from wholesome foods to harmful ones, from good remedies to shameful sickness. The healthy heart prefers what is beneficial and healing to what is harmful and damaging; the sick heart prefers the opposite. The most beneficial sustenance for the heart is faith and the best medicine is the dhikr of Allāh (ذِكْرُ اللَّهِ), and of course the Qur'ān is the remembrance of Allāh ﷻ *par excellence*.

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

°alladhīna °āāmanū wa taṭma°innu qulūbuhum bi-dhikri-llāh;  
°alā bi dhikri-llāhi taṭma°innu-l-qulūbā

Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allāh, for truly in the remembrance of Allāh do hearts find rest!  
(Sūrah Ra°d 13:28)



## The Signs of a Healthy Heart

For the heart to be healthy it should take leave of this life while still in this life (die before you die/*mawt qablu anta mawt*) and arrive in the next, and settle there as one of the people of the °akhīrah; it only came to this life as a passer-by, taking whatever provisions it needed and then returning home. As the Prophet ﷺ said to °Abdullāh ibn °Umar ؓ, “Be in this world as if you were a stranger or a passer-by.” The more diseased the heart is, the more it desires this world; it dwells in it until it becomes like one of its people.

The healthy heart continues to trouble its owner until he returns to Allāh ﷻ, and is at peace with Him, and joins Him, like a lover led by love who finally reaches his beloved. Besides his love for Him he needs no other, and after invoking Him no other invocations are needed. Serving Him precludes the need to serve any other.

If this heart misses its share of reciting the Qur'ān and invoking Allāh ﷻ, or completing one of the prescribed acts of worship, then its owner suffers more distress than a cautious man who suffers because of the loss of money or a missed opportunity to make it. It longs to serve, just as a famished person longs for food and drink.

Where

Yahya ibn Mu'adh رحمہ اللہ said: “Whoever is pleased with serving Allāh ﷻ, everything will be pleased to serve him; and whoever finds pleasure in contemplating Allāh ﷻ, the people will find pleasure in contemplating him.”

This heart has only one concern: that all its actions, and its inner thoughts and utterances, are obedient to Allāh ﷻ. It is more careful with its time than the stingiest people are with money, so that it will not be spent wastefully. When it enters into the prayer, its worldly worries and anxieties vanish and it finds its comfort and bliss in adoring its Lord. It does not cease to mention Allāh ﷻ, nor tire of serving Him, and it finds intimate company with no one save a person who guides it to Allāh ﷻ and reminds it of Allāh ﷻ.

Its attention to the correctness of its action is greater than its attention to the action itself. It is scrupulous (*wara'*) in making sure that the intentions (*niyah*) behind its actions are sincere (*mukhlis*) and pure (*tahir*) and that they result in good deeds (*'amal ṣaliḥ*).

As well as and in spite of all this, it not only testifies to the generosity of Allāh ﷻ in giving it the opportunity to carry out such actions, but also testifies to its own imperfection and shortcomings in executing them.



### The Causes of Sickness of the Heart

The temptations to which the heart is exposed are what cause its sickness. These are the temptations of desires and fancies. The former cause intentions and the will (*'irāda* / إرادة) to be corrupted, and the latter cause knowledge and belief to falter.

Hudhayfa ibn al-Yamanī رحمہ اللہ said: “The Prophet ﷺ said, “Temptations are presented to the heart, one by one. Any heart that accepts them will be left with a black stain, but any heart that rejects them will be left with a mark of purity, so that hearts are of two types: a dark heart that has turned away and become like an overturned vessel, and a pure heart that will never be harmed by temptation for as long as the earth and the heavens exist. The dark heart only recognises good and denounces evil when this suits its desires and whims.”<sup>3</sup>

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3. Muslim, *Kitāb al-ʿImān*, 2/170 (with different wording).

## Where

The Prophet ﷺ placed hearts, when exposed to temptation, into two categories: First, a heart which, when it is exposed to temptation, absorbs it like a sponge that soaks up water, leaving a black stain in it. It continues to absorb each temptation that is offered to it until it is darkened and corrupted, which is what he meant by “like an overturned vessel”. When this happens, two dangerous sicknesses take hold of it and plunge it into ruin:

The first is that of its confusing good with evil, to such an extent that it does not recognise the former and does not denounce the latter. This sickness may even gain hold of it to such an extent that it believes good to be evil and vice-versa, the sunnah to be *bid'ah* (بدعة) and vice-versa, the truth to be false and the false to be the truth.

The second is that of its setting up its desires as its judge, over and above what the Prophet ﷺ taught, so that it is enslaved and led by its whims and fancies.

Second, a pure heart in which the light of faith is bright and from which its radiance shines. When temptation is presented to pure hearts such as this, they oppose it and reject it, and so their light and illumination only increase.



### The Four Poisons of the Heart

وَاضْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْعَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ  
وَلَا تَعْدُ عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا  
وَلَا تُطِيعْ مَنْ أَغْفَلْنَا قُلُوبَهُ عَنْ دِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرُطًا

wa-ṣ-bir nafsaka ma'a-l-ladḥīna yad'ūna rabbahum bi-l-ghadāti  
wa-l-ʿaṣhiyyī yurīdūna wajhahu wa lā ta'adu ʿaynāka ʿaṇhum turīdu  
zīnata-l-ḥayāti-d-dunyā; wa lā tuṭīʿ man ʿaḡḥfalnā qalbahu ʿan  
dhikrinā wa ʿittabaʿa hawāhu wa kāna ʿamruhu furuṭān

Keep yourself patiently with those who call on their Lord  
morning and evening, desiring His face.

Do not turn your eyes from them seeking the lures of this world.

And do not obey someone

whose heart We have made neglectful of Our remembrance  
and who follows their own whims and desires  
and whose life has transgressed all bounds.

(Sūrah Kahf 18:28)



## Where

You should know that all acts of disobedience are poison to the heart and cause its sickness and ruin. They result in its will running off course, against that of Allāh ﷻ, and so its sickness festers and increases. Ibn al-Mubarak رحمه الله said: “I have seen wrong actions killing hearts, And their degradation may lead to their becoming addicted to them. Turning away from wrong actions gives life to the heart, And opposing your self is best for it.”

Whoever is concerned with the health and life of his heart must rid it of the effects of such poisons, and then protect it by avoiding new ones. If anyone takes poison by mistake, then that person should hasten to wipe out the effect of the poison by turning in repentance and seeking forgiveness from Allāh ﷻ, as well as by doing good deeds that will wipe out their wrong actions.

By the four poisons we mean unnecessary talking, unrestrained glances, too much food, and keeping bad company. Of all the poisons, these are the most widespread and have the greatest effect on the heart’s well-being.



## Unnecessary Speech

It is reported in *al-Muṣṣṇad*, on the authority of °Anās رحمه الله, that the Prophet ﷺ said: “The faith of a servant is not put right until his heart is put right, and his heart is not put right until his tongue is put right.”<sup>4</sup> This shows that the Prophet ﷺ has made the purification of faith conditional on the purification of the heart, and the purification of the heart conditional on the purification of the tongue.

at-Tirmidhī relates in a hadith on the authority of Ibn °Umar: “Do not talk excessively without remembering Allāh ﷻ, because such excessive talk without the mention of Allāh ﷻ causes the heart to harden, and the person furthest from Allāh ﷻ is a person with a hard heart.”<sup>5</sup>

°Umar Ibn al-Kḥattab رحمه الله, said: “A person who talks too much is a person who often makes mistakes, and someone who often makes mistakes often has wrong actions.

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4. Da°if ḥadīth, al-Mundḥarī, 3/234; and al-°Iraqī in *al-Iḥya*, 8/1539

5. Da°if ḥadīth, at-Tirmidhī, *Kitāb az-Zuhūd*, 7/92, ḡarīb; no one else has transmitted it other than Ibrahim ibn Abdullah ibn Hatib, whom ath-Thāhabī mentions, 1/43, stating that this is one of the ḡarīb ḥadīth attributed to him.

## Where

The Fire has a priority over such a frequent sinner.”<sup>6</sup>

In a ḥadīth related on the authority of Mu‘adh رضي الله عنه, the Prophet ﷺ said, “Shall I not tell you how to control all that?” I said, “Yes do, O Messenger of Allāh.” So he held his tongue between his fingers, and then he said: “Restrain this.” I said, “Oh Prophet of Allah, are we accountable for what we say?” He ﷺ said, “May your mother be bereft by your loss! Is there anything more than the harvest of the tongues that throws people on their faces (or he said ‘on their noses’) into the Fire?”<sup>7</sup>

What is meant here by ‘the harvest of the tongues’ is the punishment for saying forbidden things. A man, through his actions and words, sows the seeds of either good or evil. On the Day of Resurrection he harvests their fruits. Those who sow the seeds of good words and deeds harvest honor and blessings; those who sow the seeds of evil words and deeds reap only regret and remorse.

A ḥadīth related by Abū Huraira رضي الله عنه says, “What mostly causes people to be sent to the Fire are the two openings: the mouth and the private parts.”<sup>8</sup>

Abū Huraira رضي الله عنه also related that the Prophet ﷺ said, “The servant speaks words, the consequences of which he does not realise, and for which he is sent down into the depths of the Fire further than the distance between the east and the west.”<sup>9</sup>

The same ḥadīth was transmitted by at-Tirmidhī with slight variations: “The servant says something that he thinks is harmless, and for which he will be plunged into the depths of the Fire as far as seventy autumns.”<sup>10</sup>

‘Uqba ibn Amirī said: “I said: Oh Messenger of Allāh, what is our best way of surviving?” He ﷺ, replied: “Guard your tongue, make your house suffice for sheltering your privacy, and weep for your wrong actions.”<sup>11</sup>

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6. *Daʿif ḥadīth*, Ibn Hibban and al-Bayhaqi, and al-ʿIraqi in his edition of *al-Iḥya*, 8/1541

7. *Ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth*, at-Tirmidhī al-Hākim, ath-Thahābī

8. *Ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth*, at-Tirmidhī and Aḥmad; also al-Hākim and ath-Thahābī

9. al-Bukhārī in *Kitāb ar-Riqāq*, and Muslim in *Kitāb az-Zuhud*

10. at-Tirmidhī in *Kitāb az-Zuhud*; he said the ḥadīth is *ḥasan gharīb*

11. at-Tirmidhī in *Kitāb az-Zuhud* with a slightly different wording; he said the ḥadīth is *ḥasan*. This wording is reported by Abu Naʿim in *al-Hilya*

## Where

It has been related on the authority of Saḥl ibn Saʿd ؓ that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever can guarantee what is between his jaws and what is between his legs is guaranteed the Garden.”<sup>12</sup>

It has also been related by Abū Huraira ؓ, that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Let whoever believes in Allāh and the Last Day either speak good or remain silent.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus talking can either be good, in which case it is commendable, or bad, in which case it is forbidden (*ḥarām*/حَرَام).

The Prophet ﷺ said: “Everything the children of ʿĀdam say goes against them, except for their enjoining good and forbidding evil, and remembering Allāh, Glorious and Mighty is He.” This was reported by at-Tirmidhī and Ibn Maʿjah on the authority of ʿUmm Ḥabība ؓ.<sup>14</sup>

ʿUmar ibn al-Kḥattab visited Abu Bakr ؓ and found him pulling his tongue with his fingers. ʿUmar said “Stop! may Allāh forgive you!” Abu Bakr ؓ replied; “This tongue has brought me to dangerous places.”<sup>15</sup>

ʿAbdullah ibn Masʿūd ؓ said: “By Allāh, besides Whom no god exists, nothing deserves a long prison sentence more than my tongue.” He also used to say: “O tongue, say good and you will profit; desist from saying evil things and you will be safe; otherwise you will find only regret.”

Abū Huraira ؓ reported that Ibn al-Abbas ؓ said: “A person will not feel greater fury or anger for any part of his body on the Day of Judgement more than what he will feel for his tongue, unless he only used it for saying or enjoining good.”

al-Ḥasan bin ʿAlī ؓ said: “Whoever does not hold his tongue cannot understand his religion (*dīn*).”

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12. al-Buḥḥārī, *Kitāb ar-Riqāq*, 11/308 and *Kitāb al-Hudūd*, 12/113

13. al-Buḥḥārī, *Kitāb ar-Riqāq*, 11/308; Muslim, *Kitāb al-ʾImān*, 2/18. The complete hadith is: “Let whoever believes in Allāh and the Last Day either speak good or remain silent; and let whoever believes in Allāh and the Last Day be generous to his neighbour; and let whoever believes in Allāh and the Last Day be generous to his guest.”

14. This hadith is *ḥasan* and is reported by at-Tirmidhī in *Kitāb az-Zuhud* and by Ibn Majah in *Kitāb al-Fiṭan*. at-Tirmidhī classifies it as *ḥasan ḡarīb*. We have no report of it other than from Muḥammad ibn Yazid ibn Khanis.

15. *Ḥasan* according to Abu Yaʿla, Baihaqī and as-Suyuti. *Muṣnad*, 1/201; as-Saʿati

## Where

The least harmful of a tongue's faults is talking about whatever does not concern it. The following ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ is enough to indicate the harm of this fault: "One of the merits of a person's ʿIslām is his abandoning what does not concern him."<sup>16</sup>

Abū ʿUbaida رضي الله عنه related that al-Ḥassan رضي الله عنه said: "One of the signs of Allāh's abandoning a servant is His making him preoccupied with what does not concern him."

Sahl رضي الله عنه said, "Whoever talks about what does not concern him is deprived of truthfulness."

As we have already mentioned above, this is the least harmful of the faults of the tongue. There are far worse things, like backbiting, gossiping, obscene and misleading talk, two-faced and hypocritical talk, showing off, quarrelling, bickering, lying, mockery, derision and falsehood; and there are many more faults which can affect a servant's tongue, ruining his heart and causing him to lose both his happiness and pleasure in this life and his success and profit in the next life. And Allah ﷻ is the One to Whom we turn for assistance.



## Unrestrained Glances

The unrestrained glance results in the one who looks becoming attracted to what he sees, and in the imprinting of an image of what he sees in his heart. This can result in several kinds of corruption in the servant. The following are a number of them:

It has been related that the Prophet ﷺ once said words to the effect: "The glance is a poisoned arrow of Shayṭān. Whoever lowers his gaze for Allāh, He will bestow upon him a refreshing sweetness which he will find in his heart on the day that he meets Him."<sup>17</sup>

Shayṭān enters with the glance, for he travels with it, faster than the wind blowing through an empty place. He makes what is seen appear more beautiful than it really is, and transforms it into an idol for the heart to worship. Then he promises it false rewards, lights the fire of desires within it, and fuels it with the wood of forbidden actions, which the servant would not have committed had it not been for this distorted image.

16. Saḥīḥ, at-Tirmidhī, *Kitāb az-Zuhūd*, 6/607; Aḥmad, *al-Muṣnad*, 1/201; as-Saʿatī, *al-Fathu-r-Rabbani*, 19/257; ḥadīth number 12 in an-Nawawī's *Forty Ḥadīth*.

17. *Daʿīf*, at-Tabarānī, 8/63; al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*, 4/314; Aḥmad, *al-Muṣnad*, 5/264

Where

This distracts the heart and makes it forget its more important concerns. It stands between it and them; and so the heart loses its straight path and falls into the pit of desire and ignorance. As we mentioned earlier, Allāh ﷻ says:

وَلَا تَعْدُ عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا  
وَلَا تُطِيعْ مَنْ أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرُطًا

wa lā ta°du °aynāka °añhum turīdu zīnata-l-ḥayāti-d-dunyā;  
wa lā tuṭī° man °āghfalnā qalbahu °an dhikrinā  
wa °ittaba°a hawāhu wa kāna °amruhu furuṭān

Do not turn your eyes from them, desiring the glitter of this world.

And do not obey someone

whose heart We have made neglectful of Our remembrance  
and who follows his own whims and desires  
and whose life has transgressed all bounds.

(Sūrah Kahf 18:28)

The unrestrained gaze causes all three afflictions.

It has been said that between the eye and the heart is an immediate connection; if the eyes are corrupted, then the heart follows. It becomes like a rubbish heap where all the dirt and filth and rottenness collect, and so there is no room for love of Allāh ﷻ, relating all matters to Him, awareness of being in the presence of Allāh ﷻ, and feeling joy at His proximity only the opposite of these things can inhabit such a heart.

Staring and gazing without restraint is disobedience to Allāh ﷻ:

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا أَرْوَاحَهُمْ  
ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ إِنْ أَنْتَ إِنْ اللَّهَ خَيْرٌ بِمَا بَصْنَعُونَ

qul li-l-mu°minīna

yaghuddū min abāṣārihim wa yahfadḥū furūjahum  
dhālika azkā lahum; °inna-llāha kḥabīrun bima yaṣna°ūn

Say to the believers

that they should lower their eyes and guard their private parts.

That is purer for them — Allah is aware of what they do.

(Sūrah Nūr 24:30)

Only the one who obeys the commands of Allāh ﷻ is content in this world, and only the servant who obeys Allāh ﷻ will survive in the next world.

## Where

Furthermore, letting the gaze roam free cloaks the heart with darkness, just as lowering the gaze for Allāh ﷻ clothes it in light. After the above <sup>°</sup>āyat, Allāh ﷻ says in the same sūrah:

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِثْلُ نُورٍ كَمِشْكَاهٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ  
الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ  
يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ  
يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ  
وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Allāhu nūru-s-samawāti wa-l-<sup>°</sup>arḍi  
maṭḥalu nūrihi kamishkātīn fihā miṣbāh:

al-miṣbāhu fī zujājat: az-zujājatu kānnahā kawkabun durrīyyun  
yūqadu min shajaratīn mubārakatin zaytūnatin  
lā sharqiyyatin wa la gharbiyyatin  
yakādu zaytuhā yuḍī<sup>°</sup>u wa law lam tamsashu nār:  
nūrun <sup>°</sup>alā nūr:

yahdī-llāhu li nūrihi mañy-yashā<sup>°</sup>u  
wa yaḍāribu-llāhu-l-<sup>°</sup>amṭhāla li-n-nās:  
wa-llāhu bi-kulli shay<sup>°</sup>in <sup>°</sup>alīm

Allāh is the light of the heavens and the earth:  
the likeness of His light is as if there were a niche,  
and in the niche is a lamp, and in the lamp is a glass,  
and the glass as it were a brilliant star, lit from a blessed tree,  
an olive, neither of the east nor of the west,  
whose oil is well nigh luminous, though fire never touched it.

Light upon light.

Allāh guides whomever He wants to His Light.

Allāh makes metaphors for people; and Allāh knows all things.

(Sūrah Nūr 24:35)

When the heart is a light, countless good comes to it from all directions. If it is dark, then clouds of evil and afflictions come from all directions to cover it up.

Allowing the gaze to run loose makes the heart blind to distinguishing between truth and falsehood. Lowering the gaze for the sake of Allāh ﷻ gives it a penetrating, true and distinguishing insight.



## Where

A righteous person once said: “Whoever enriches his outward behavior by following the sunnah, and makes his inward soul weathy thorough contemplation, and averts his gaze away from looking at what is forbidden, and avoids anything doubtful, and feeds only on what is *ḥalāl* (حلال) – his inner sight will never falter.”

Rewards for actions come in kind. Whoever lowers his gaze from what Allāh ﷻ has forbidden, Allāh ﷻ will give his inner sight abundant light.



## Too Much Food

The consumption of small amounts of food guarantees tenderness of the heart, strength of the intellect, humility of the self, weakness of desires, and gentleness of temperament. Immoderate eating brings about the opposite of these praiseworthy qualities.

al-Miqdam ibn Ma'd Yakrib ؓ said: “I heard the Prophet ﷺ say: ‘The son of ʿĀdam fills no vessel more displeasing to Allāh than his stomach. A few morsels should be enough for him to preserve his strength. If he must fill it, then he should allow a third for his food, a third for his drink and leave a third empty for easy breathing.’”<sup>18</sup>

Excessive eating induces many kinds of harm. It makes the body incline towards disobedience to Allāh ﷻ and makes worship and obedience seem laborious.

A full stomach and excessive eating have caused many a wrong action and inhibited much worship. Whoever safeguards against the evils of overfilling their stomach has prevented great evil. It is easier for Shayṭān to control a person who has filled their stomach with food and drink, which is why it has often been said: “Restrict the pathways of Shayṭān by fasting.”<sup>19</sup>

It has been reported that when a group of young men from the Banī ʾIsrāʾīl (بنی إسرائيل) were worshipping, and it was time for them to break their fast, a man stood up and said: “Do not eat too much, otherwise you will drink too much, and then you will end up sleeping too much, and in the end you will lose too much.”

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18. *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Aḥmad, *al-Muṣṣnad*, 4/132; as-Saʿati, *al-Faṭḥ ar-Rabbani*, 17/88; at-Tirmidhī, *Kitāb az-Zuhūd*, 7/51.

19. *Daʿif*; it does not appear in most of the sources of the sunnah, but is mentioned in al-Ghazzālī's *al-Iḥyā*, 8/1488

## Where

The Prophet ﷺ and his companions used to go hungry quite frequently. Although this was often due to a shortage of food, Allāh ﷻ decreed the best and most favourable conditions for His Messenger, may Allāh ﷻ. This is why Ibn ʿUmar and his father before him – in spite of the abundance of food available to them – modelled their eating habits on those of the Prophet ﷺ.

It has been reported that ʿĀʿisha رضي الله عنها said: “From the time of their arrival in Madinah up until his death ﷺ, the family of Muhammed ﷺ never ate their fill of bread made from wheat three nights in a row.”<sup>20</sup>

ʿIbārāhīm ibn Adham رضي الله عنه said “Any one who controls his stomach is in control of his dīn, and anyone who controls his hunger is in control of good behaviour. Disobedience towards Allāh ﷻ is nearest to a person who is satiated with a full stomach, and furthest away from a person who is hungry.”



## Keeping Bad Company

Unnecessary companionship is a chronic disease that causes much harm. How often have the wrong kind of companionship and inter-mixing deprived people of the generosity of Allāh ﷻ, planting discord in their hearts which even the passage of time – even if it were long enough for mountains to be worn away – has been unable to dispel. In keeping such company one can find the roots of loss, both in this life and in the next.

A servant should benefit from companionship. In order to do so he should divide people into four categories, and be careful not to get them mixed up, for once one of them is mixed with another, then evil can find its way through to him:

The first category are those people whose company is like food: it is indispensable, night or day. Once a servant has taken his need from it, he leaves it be until he requires it again, and so on. These are the people with knowledge of Allāh ﷻ – of His commands, of the plots of His enemies, and of the diseases of the heart and their remedies – who love Allāh ﷻ, and wish His Prophet ﷺ and His family رضي الله عنهم and companions رضي الله عنهم the best in this world and the next. Associating with this type of person is an achievement in itself.

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20. al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Aṭʿima*, 9/549; and Muslim, *Kitāb az-Zuhūd*, 8/105

## Where

The second category are those people whose company is like a medicine. They are only required when a disease sets in. When you are healthy, you have no need of them. However, associating with them is sometimes necessary for your livelihood, businesses, consultations and the like. Once what you need from them has been fulfilled, mixing with them should be avoided.

The third category are those people whose company is harmful. Mixing with this type of person is like a disease, in all its variety and degrees and strengths and weaknesses. Associating with one or some of them is like an incurable chronic disease. You will never profit either in this life or in the next life if you have them for company, and you will surely lose either one or both of your *dīn* and your livelihood because of them. If their companionship has taken hold of you and is established, then it becomes a fatal, terrifying sickness.

Amongst such people are those who neither speak any good that might benefit you, nor listen closely to you so that they might benefit from you. They do not know their souls and consequently put their selves in the place of their souls. If they speak, their words fall on their listeners' hearts like the lashes of a whip, while all the while they are full of admiration for and delight in their own words.

They cause distress to those in their company, while believing that they are the sweet scent of the gathering. If they are silent, they are heavier than a massive millstone – too heavy to carry or even drag across the floor.<sup>21</sup>

All in all, mixing with anyone who is bad for the soul will not last, even if it is unavoidable. It can be one of the most distressing aspects of a servant's life to be plagued by such person, with whom it may be necessary to associate.

In such a relationship, a servant should cling to good behaviour, only presenting him with his outward appearance, while disguising his inner soul, until Allāh ﷻ offers him a way out of his affliction and the means of escape from this situation.

The fourth category are those people whose company is doom itself.

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21. °Imām ash-Shāfi'ī (الشافعي) رحمه الله is reported to have said, “Whenever a tedious person sits next to me, the side on which he is sitting feels lower down than the other side of me.”

## Where

Associating with them is like taking poison: its victim either finds an antidote or perishes. Many people belong to this category. They are the people of religious innovation (*bid'ah*/بِدْعَة) and misguidance, those who abandon the sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ and advocate other beliefs. They call what is the sunnah an innovation and vice-versa. A person with any intellect should not sit in their assemblies nor mix with them. The result of doing so will either be the death of his heart or, at the very best, its falling seriously ill.



## What Gives the Heart Life and Sustenance?

Acts of obedience (*tā'ah*/طَاعَة) are essential to the well being of the heart of the servant of Allāh ﷻ, just in the same way that food and drink are to that of the body. All wrong or false actions are the same as poisonous foods, and they inevitably harm the heart.

The confirmed servant (*‘abdullāh*) feels the need to worship Allāh ﷻ, for such a servant is naturally in constant need of His help and assistance.

In order to maintain the well being of the body, the servant carefully follows a strict diet. Such a confirmed servant (*‘abd*) habitually and as a matter of course eats wholesome food at regular intervals, and is quick to free the stomach of harmful elements in the case of eating any kind of impure food by mistake.

The well being of the heart, however, is far more important than that of the body, for while the well being of the body enables the servant to lead a life that is free from illnesses in this world, that of the heart ensures the servant both a fortunate life in this world and eternal bliss in the next.

In the same way, while the death of the body cuts the servant off from this world, the death of the heart results in everlasting anguish. A righteous man once said, “How odd, that some people mourn for the one whose body has died, but never mourn for the one whose heart has died – and yet the death of the heart is far more serious!”

Thus acts of obedience are indispensable to the well being of the heart. It is worthwhile mentioning the following acts of obedience since they are very necessary and essential for the heart of the *‘abd*: *dhikrullāh*, Qur’anic recitation, seeking forgiveness, making *du‘ā’*, *darūd* on the Prophet ﷺ as well as the night prayer (*tahajjud*/تَهَجُّد).



### The Nature of Intention

The intention (*niyyah*/نية) is what one evokes in one's heart to do an act for the sake of Allāh ﷻ. As such it is not just a matter of saying the words, "I intend to do so and so." but rather it is an overflowing of the heart in which there exists internal struggles inspired by Allāh ﷻ. At times it is made easy, at other times, difficult. A person whose heart is overwhelmingly righteous finds it easy to summon good intentions at most times. Such a person has a heart generally inclined to the roots of goodness which, most of the time, blossom into the manifestation of good actions. As for those whose hearts incline towards and are overwhelmed by worldly matters, they find this very difficult to carry out the *sunnah* and even obligatory acts of worship may become difficult and tiresome for such a person.

According to Ibn Rajab's *Commentary on 'Imām Nawawī's Forty Hadith*, Hadith No. 1, reads, 'actions are but by intentions' based on 'Umar bin al-Khattab's ﷺ narration that the Prophet ﷺ said: "Deeds are [a result] only of the intentions [of the actor], and an individual is [rewarded] only according to that which he intends."

'Imām ash-Shāf'ī said: "This ḥadīth is a third of all knowledge." The words, "actions are only by intention", mean that deeds which are performed in accordance with the *sunnah* are only acceptable and rewarded if the intentions behind them were sincere. It is like the saying of the Prophet ﷺ "Actions depend upon their outcome."<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, the words, "every one shall only have what they intended", mean that the reward for an action depends upon the intention behind it.

After stating this principle, the Prophet ﷺ gave examples of it by saying, "He whose hijra was for Allāh and His Messenger, so then his hijra was for Allāh and His Messenger, and he whose hijra was to achieve some worldly benefit or to take some woman in marriage, so then his hijra was for that for which he made hijra."<sup>23</sup> So deeds which are apparently identical may differ, because the intentions behind them are different in degrees of right and wrong, from one person to another.

22. al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Qadar*, 11/499

23. al-Bukhārī, and Muslim

Good intentions do not change the nature of forbidden actions. The ignorant should not misconstrue the meaning of the ḥadīth and think that good intentions could turn forbidden actions into acceptable ones. The above saying of the Prophet ﷺ specifically relates to acts of worship and permissible actions, not to forbidden ones. Worship and permissible actions can be turned into forbidden ones because of the intentions behind them, and permissible actions can become either good or bad deeds by intention; but wrong actions cannot become acts of worship, even with good intentions.<sup>24</sup> When bad intentions are accompanied by flaws in the actions themselves, then their gravity and punishment are multiplied.

Any praiseworthy act must be rooted in sound intentions; only then could it be deemed worthy of reward. The fundamental principle should be that the act is intended for the worship of Allāh ﷻ alone. If our intention is to show off, then these same acts of worship will in fact become acts of disobedience. Permissible deeds done with good intention can potentially turn them into excellent acts which bring a person nearer to Allāh ﷻ and confer on that person the gift of closeness or nearness (*qurb*/قرب) to Allāh ﷻ.

°Umar ibn al-Kḥattab رضي الله عنه said: “The best acts are doing what Allāh has commanded, staying away from what Allāh has forbidden, and having sincere intentions towards whatever Allāh has required of us.”<sup>25</sup>

24. This is illustrated in a hadith recorded by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, in which it is related on the authority of Abu Dharr رضي الله عنه that the Prophet ﷺ said, “You will receive the reward for *ṣadaqah* even when you have sexual intercourse with your wives.” The sahabah رضي الله عنه said, “Will we really be rewarded for satisfying our physical desires?” He ﷺ replied, “If you have forbidden (*ḥarām*/حرام) intercourse, you will be committing a sin; similarly, if you have permitted (*ḥalāl*/حلال) intercourse, you will be rewarded.” an-Nawawi said, “This ḥadīth clearly shows that permissible actions become acts of obedience if there is a good intention behind them; sexual intercourse becomes an act of worship if it is accompanied by any one of the following good intentions: keeping company with your wife in kindness, as Allah ﷻ has commanded; hoping to have, as a result of intercourse, good and righteous offspring; guarding your chastity and that of your wife; helping to prevent ḥarām lustful glances or thoughts, or ḥarām intercourse; and any other good intention.”

25. Tahdhīb al-°Asma li-Nawawi, 1/173. Abu Ishaq ash-Shirazi once entered the masjid to have something to eat, as was his custom, and realised he had dropped a dinar. He retraced his steps and found it lying on the ground, but then left it where it was, saying, “Perhaps it is not mine; perhaps it belongs to someone else.”



Where

One who came before us said: “Many small actions are made great by the intentions behind them. Many great actions, on the other hand, are made small because the intentions behind them are lacking.” Yaḥya bin Abū Kathīr رحمته الله said: “Learn about intentions, for their importance is greater than the importance of actions.”



### Sincerity

Sincerity is the freeing of one's intentions from all impurities in order to come nearer to Allāh ﷻ. It is to ensure that the intentions of obedience to Allāh ﷻ are exclusively for His pleasure. It is the perpetual contemplation of the Creator, to the extent that one forgets the creation.

Sincerity is a condition for acceptance by Allāh ﷻ of good deeds performed in accordance with the sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ. Allāh ﷻ has commanded this in the Qur'ān:

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ

wa mā 'umirū 'illā li-ya'budu-llāha mukhliṣīna lahu-d-dīna hunafā'a

And they have been commanded to worship only Allāh,  
making their *dīn* sincerely His as people of pure natural belief.

(Sūratu-l-Bayyinah 98:5)

°Abū °Umama رضي الله عنه has related that a man came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, “What of a man who joined us in the fighting, and his intention was for fame and booty?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “He gets nothing.” The man repeated the question three times and each time the Prophet ﷺ said, “He gets nothing.” Then he said, “Allāh only accepts actions that are intended purely for His pleasure.”<sup>26</sup>

°Abū Sa'id al-Khudrī related that the Prophet ﷺ said in his *khutbah* during the farewell pilgrimage, “Allāh will bless whoever hears these words and whoever understands them, for it may be that those who pass on this knowledge are not those who will understand it the best. There are three things concerning which the heart of a believer should feel no enmity or malice: devoting one's actions to Allāh ﷻ, giving counsel to the leaders of the Muslims, and loyalty to the community (°ummah/أمة) of Muslims.”<sup>27</sup>

26. Ṣaḥīḥ, an-Nisa°-Kitāb al-Jihād, 6/25; al-Ḥafidh ibn Hajar, *Faṭḥ al-Qadīr*

27. Ṣaḥīḥ, Ibn Ma'jah; also Ibn Hibban, *Marwarid adh-Dham'an*, p.47, on the authority of Zayd ibn Thābit.

Where

What is meant here is that these three things strengthen the heart, and whoever distinguishes himself in them will have a heart purified from all manner of deceit, corruption and evil.

A servant can only free himself from Shayṭān through sincere devotion, for Allāh ﷻ tells us in the Qur'ān that Iblis said to Him:

إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمُ الْمُخْلَصِينَ

°illā °ibādaka minhumu-l-mukhlaṣīn

Except those of Your servants who are sincere.

(Sūrah Ṣawd 38:83)

It has been related that there was a good man who used to say, “Oh self, be devout and you will be pure.” When any worldly fortune, in which the self finds comfort and towards which the heart inclines, intrudes upon our worship, then it impairs the purity of our efforts and ruins our sincerity. People are often preoccupied with their good fortune and immersed in their desires and appetites; rarely are their actions or acts of worship free of temporary objectives and desires of this kind. For this reason it has been said that whoever secures a single moment of pure devotion to Allāh ﷻ in their life will survive, for devotion is rare and precious, and cleansing the heart of its impurities is an exacting undertaking.

In fact, devotion is the purifying of the heart from all impurities, whether few or many, so that the intention of drawing nearer to Allāh ﷻ is freed from all other motives, except that of seeking His pleasure. This can only come from a lover of Allāh ﷻ who is so absorbed in contemplation of Allāh ﷻ that there remains in their heart no place for the love of this world. Such a person must be devoted and pure in all their actions, even in eating, drinking and answering the calls of nature. With rare exceptions, anyone who is not like this will find the door of devotion closed in his face.

The everyday actions of a person who is overwhelmed by his or her love for Allāh ﷻ and the final world (*al-ākhirah*/الأخرة) are characterised by their love and they are, in fact, pure devotion. In the same way, anyone whose soul is overwhelmed by love for and pre-occupation with this world, or status and authority, will be so overwhelmed by these things that no act of worship, be it prayer or fasting, will be acceptable, except in very rare cases.

The remedy for love of this world is to break the worldly desires of

## Where

the self, ending its greed for this world and purifying it in preparation for the next world. This will then become the state of the heart and sincere devotion will become easier to attain. There are a great many actions where a person acts, thinking they are purely intended for the pleasure of Allāh ﷻ, but they are deluded, for failing to see the defects in them.

A story is told about a man who was used to praying in the first row in the masjid. One day he was late for the prayer, so he prayed in the second row. Feeling embarrassment when people saw him in the second row, he realised that the pleasure and satisfaction of the heart that he used to gain from praying in the first row were due to his seeing people seeing him there and admiring him for it. This is a subtle and intangible condition and actions are rarely safe from it. Apart from those whom Allāh ﷻ has assisted, few are aware of such delicate matters. Those who do not realise it only come to see their good deeds appearing as bad ones on the Day of Resurrection; they are the ones referred to in the words of Allāh ﷻ:

وَبَدَّ لَهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يَكُونُوا يَحْتَسِبُونَ • وَبَدَّ لَهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا كَسَبُوا

wa badā lahum mina-llāhi mā-lam yakūnū yaḥtasibūn:  
wa badā lahum sayyi<sup>o</sup>ātu mā kasabū

And something will come to them from Allah  
which they had never anticipated,  
for the evil of their deeds will become apparent to them.  
(Sūrah az-Zumar 39:47-48)

هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا  
الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعْيُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا

qul hal nunabbi<sup>o</sup>ukum bi-l-<sup>o</sup>akḥsarīna a<sup>o</sup>mālan?  
<sup>o</sup>alladhīna ḍalla sa<sup>o</sup>yuhum fi-l-ḥayāti-d-dunyā  
wa hum yaḥsabūna <sup>o</sup>annahum yuḥsinūna ṣun<sup>o</sup>ā

Shall We tell you who will lose most in respect of their deeds?  
Those whose efforts were astray in the life of this world,  
while they thought that they were doing good works.  
(Sūrah Kahf 18:103-104)

Yaqūb ؑ said: “A devout person is someone who conceals things that are good, in the same way that he conceals things that are bad.”

Where

as-Sousi ؓ said: "True devotion<sup>28</sup> is to lose the faculty of being conscious of your devotion; for someone who identifies devotion in his devotion is a person whose devotion is in need of devotion." To contemplate devotion is to admire it, and admiration is an affliction; and that which is pure is whatever is free of all afflictions. This means that one's deeds should be purified from any self-admiration concerning the actions they entail.

Ayyūb ؓ said: "It is much harder for the people of action to purify their intentions than it is to execute any of their actions."

Also it is said: "To be devout for a short while is to survive for ever, but devotion is rare."

Suhail ؓ was asked: "What is the most difficult thing for the self? He said: "Devotion, when the self does not have the good fortune of being endowed with it."

al-Fudayl ؓ said: "Forsaking action for the sake of other people is to seek their admiration. To act for the sake of their admiration is to associate others with Allāh ﷻ. Devotion is when Allāh ﷻ frees you from both of these states."



### The Excellence of Knowledge and Teaching

There are many proofs in the Qur'an concerning the excellence of knowledge and its transmission. Allah ﷻ says:

يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ ؕ

yarfa°i-llāhu-l-ladhīna °āamanū minkum  
wa-l-ladhīna °ūtū -l-°ilma darajāt

Allāh will raise up to high ranks those of you who believe  
and those who have been given knowledge.

(Sūratu-l-Mujādilah 58:11)

28. By devotion is meant *at-taqwā* (التقوى), which is the Islamic concept of consciousness and respect and wariness of Allāh ﷻ. The term *taqwā* comes from the Arabic root W-Q-Y from the 8th stem verb, °ittaqā "to protect oneself" or "be wary or aware". Contrary to many translations of the Qur'ān where this word is translated as "fear" (*khawf*/خوف), it has little to do with fear as such, but much more to do with being aware or conscious of Allāh. This breeds respect, wariness and, finally, devotion built on knowledge and awareness. In many ways it is cognate with or related to °ihsan (إحسان) which means "to worship Allāh ﷻ as though you saw Allāh ﷻ knowing if you do not see Allāh ﷻ yet Allāh ﷻ sees you."

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قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

qul hal yastawī-l-ladhīna ya<sup>°</sup>lamūna wa-l-ladhīna lā ya<sup>°</sup>lamūn

Say, “Are those who know equal to those who do not know?”

(Sūrah az-Zumar 39:9)

The Prophet ﷺ says, “When Allāh desires good for someone, He gives him understanding of the dīn.”<sup>29</sup> He ﷺ also says, “Allāh makes the way to the Garden easy for whoever treads a path in search of knowledge.”<sup>30</sup>

Travelling on the path to knowledge refers both to walking along an actual pathway, such as going on foot to the assemblies of the ‘*ūlemā’* *muṭaqīn* and the ‘*awliyā’* *karām*, as well as to following an internal (*bāṭin*) metaphysical road.

The above saying of the Prophet ﷺ probably means that Allāh ﷻ makes learning the useful knowledge that is sought after easier for the seeker, clearing the way for him and smoothing his journey. Some of our predecessors used to say: “Is there anyone seeking knowledge, so that we can assist him in finding it?”

This ḥadīth also alludes to the road leading to the Garden on the Day of Judgement, which is the straight path and to what precedes it and what comes after it.

Knowledge (‘*ilm*/علم) is also the shortest path to Allāh ﷻ. Whoever travels the road of knowledge reaches Allāh ﷻ and the Garden by the shortest route. Knowledge also clears the way out of darkness, ignorance, doubt and scepticism which is, among other reasons, why Allāh ﷻ called both the Qur’ān and the Prophet ﷺ, ‘Light’.

قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ

qadā jā’akum mina-llāhi nūruñw-wa kitābum-mubīn

there has come to you from Allāh Light and a Clear Book

(Sūratu-l-Ma’idah 5:15)

al-Bukhārī and Muslim reported on the authority of ibn ‘Umar ؓ that the Prophet ﷺ said: “Alāh will not take away knowledge by snatching it away from people, but by taking away the lives of the people of knowledge one by one until none of them survive.

29. al-Bukhārī and Muslim. .

30. Muslim, 21/17

## Where

Then the people will adopt ignorant people as their leaders. They will be asked to deliver judgements and they will give them without knowledge, with the result that they will go astray and lead others astray.”

When °Ubadah ibn as-Şamit ؓ was asked about this ḥadīth he said: “If you want, I will tell you what the highest knowledge is which raises people in rank: it is humility.”

He said this because there are two types of knowledge.

The first produces its fruit in the heart. It is knowledge of Allāh, the Exalted – His Names, His Attributes, and His Acts – which commands fear, respect, exaltation, love, supplication and reliance on Him. this is the beneficial type of knowledge. As ibn Mas'ud said: “They will recite the Qur’ān, but it will not go beyond their throats. The Qur’ān is only beneficial when it reaches the heart and is firmly planted in it.”

al-Hasan bin °Alī ؓ said: “There are two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the tongue, which can be a case against the son of Adam, as is mentioned in the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ: ‘The Qur’ān is either a case for you or a case against you’,<sup>31</sup> and knowledge of the heart, which is beneficial knowledge. The second kind is the beneficial kind which raises people in rank; it is the inner knowledge which is absorbed by the heart and puts it right. The knowledge that is on the tongue is taken lightly by people: neither those who possess it, nor anyone else, acts upon it, and then it vanishes when its owners vanish on the Day of Judgement, when creation will be brought to account.”<sup>32</sup>

We wrote at the outset that the Prophet ﷺ said: “Truly, there is in the body a small piece of flesh; if it is good the whole body is good and if it is corrupted the whole body is corrupted; lo! it is the heart.”<sup>33</sup>

It is here from *where* we began and what has come between that and this is what is understood as the basis of purification of the heart.

Further an-Nawawī said: This ḥadīth was used as proof that the seat of the mind is the heart (*al-°aql fi-l-qalb*) and not the head.

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31. Muslim, *Kitāb at-Taḥara*, 3/99

32. above compiled from the works of Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, Ibn Al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali in the Purification of the Heart.

33. Narrated from al-Nu'man ibn Bashīr in the Six Books



## Where

For this reason this last section comes under the rubric *The Excellence of Knowledge and Teaching* because without knowledge (*ʿilm*) and teaching (*taʿlīm*) the heart cannot be purified.

The overwhelming majority of Shafīʿi scholars hold that the seat of reason is the heart though Abū Ḥanīfa held it to be the brain or it might also be said to be the head. The philosophers are said to hold the first position, the physicians the second. al-Mazirī said: “Those who hold it is in the heart adduced as proof the saying of Allāh ﷻ:

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَتَكُونَ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ يَعْقِلُونَ بِهَا أَوْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا  
فَإِنَّمَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِنْ تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ

ʾafalam yasīrū fi-l-ʾarḍi  
fa-takūna lahum qulūbun yaʿqilūna bihā  
ʾaw ʾāādhanuṇy-yasmaʿūna bihā:  
fa-ʾinnahā lā taʿma-l-ʾabāṣāru  
wa lakin taʿma-l-qulūbu ʾallatī fi-ṣ-ṣudūr

Have they not travelled about the earth  
and do they not have hearts to understand with or ears to hear with?  
It is not their eyes which are blind  
but the hearts in their breasts which are blind.

(Sūrah al-Ḥajj 22:46)

إِن فِي ذَلِكَ لَذِكْرٍ لِّمَن كَانَ لَدُّ قَلْبٍ أَوْ أَلْقَى السَّمْعَ وَهُوَ شَهِيدٌ  
ʾinna fī dhālika ladhikrā li-man kāna lahu qalibun  
ʾaw ʾalqa-s-samʿa wa huwa ṣhahīdun

There is a reminder in that for anyone who has a heart,  
or who listens well, having seen the evidence.

(Sūrah Qaf 50:37)

The Prophet ﷺ said, pointing to the heart: “Consciousness of Allāh is right here” (*at-taqwaha-huna*).<sup>34</sup>

Another narration states: “Verily, Allāh looks not at your bodies nor at your faces but He looks at your hearts.”<sup>35</sup>

34. Narrated from Abu Hurayra by Muslim, and in various wordings from Abu Hurayra, Anas, and others by al-Tirmidhi (*ḥasan gharīb*), Aḥmad, at-Tabarani, Abu Yaʿla, and Abu Nuʿaym.

35. Narrated from Abu Hurayra by Muslim and Ibn Majah

Where

رَبَّنَا لَا تُغِثْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً ۚ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ

rabbana la tuzigh qulūbana ba°da °idh hadaytanā  
wahab lana mil- ladunka rahmah: °innaka °ańta-l-wahhābā

Our Lord, do not let our hearts swerve after You have guided us.  
And give us mercy from You — You are the Ever-Giving.

(Sūrah °Āl °Imrān 3:8)

The Prophet ﷺ used to often say these words, “O You Who changes the hearts, make my heart firm on Your religion.” We said, ‘O Messenger of Allāh! We believed in you and in what you brought us. Are you afraid for us?’ He said, “Yes, for the hearts are between two of Allah’s Fingers, He changes them (as He wills).”<sup>36</sup>

“I asked Umm Salamah ؓ: ‘Oh Mother of the Believers, what is the *du°ā°* which the Prophet ﷺ would supplicate the most while in your presence?’ She said : ‘The most frequent supplication of his was:

“Oh, Turner of the hearts, make my heart firm on Your religion.”<sup>37</sup>

Taking this all, so to speak, to heart we make supplication along with the Prophet ﷺ, “Oh Allāh, grant to my soul the sense of righteousness and purify it, for You art the Best Purifier of it. You art the Protecting Friend of it, and Guardian of it. Oh Allah, I seek refuge in You from the knowledge which does not benefit, from the heart that does not entertain awareness (of Allāh), from the soul that does not feel contented and the *du°ā°* which is not answered.”<sup>38</sup>

وَلَا تُخْزِنِي يَوْمَ يُرْعَتُونَ ۚ يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ ۚ إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

wa lā tukhzinī yawma yubā°athūn:  
yawma lā yanfa°u mālun wa lā banūn:  
°illā man °ata-llāha bi-qalbin salīm

and do not disgrace me on the Day they are raised up  
the Day when neither wealth nor sons will be of any use  
except those who come to Allah with sound and flawless hearts.

(Sūrah ash-Shu°arā° 26:87-89)

*wa-llāhu °alim*

36. Ibn Majah 3834

37. Aḥmad

38. Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim



يَا مُقَلِّبَ الْقُلُوبِ ثَبِّتْ قَلْبِي عَلَى دِينِكَ

yā muqalliba-l-qulūbi ṭḥabbīt qalbī ʿala dīnik  
oh turner of the hearts make firm my heart on your dīn

وَعَلِّمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ

ʿalamū ʾanna-llāha yaḥūlu bayna-l-marʾi wa qalbih  
know that Allāh comes between a person and his heart  
(Sūratu-l-Aṇfāl 8:24)

وَعَلِّمُوا

that surely, the hearts of all the of the children of Adam  
are between the fingers of the Compassionate Lord  
as one heart.

He turns that in any direction He likes.

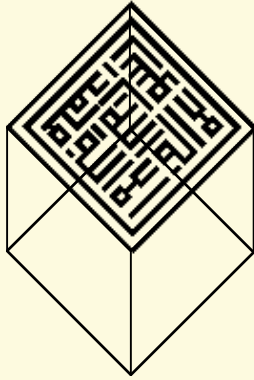
Thus the Prophet ﷺ said:

“Oh Allah, the Turner of the hearts,  
turn our hearts to Yours in obedience.”

اللَّهُمَّ  
مُصَرِّفَ الْقُلُوبِ صَرِّفْ قُلُوبَنَا عَلَى طَاعَتِكَ

yā allāh

muṣarrifa-l-qulūbi ṣarrif qulūbanā ʿalā ṭāʿatik  
(Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)



noon hierographers  
green mountain  
virginia  
usa